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**Scotland's Authentic Plurality:
The New Essentialism in Scottish Studies**

Towards the end of his travelogue, *Raw Spirit* (2003), Iain Banks reflects on the symbolic lesson taught to him by his tour of Scotland's whisky distilleries. His preference, he realises, is for whiskies which have been influenced by flavours from other countries, by drinks such as 'American bourbon, or Spanish sherry, or Portuguese port, or French wine or Cuban rum'. His favourite whiskies

are still very much single malts, they are still very much Scotch, but it's the interplay between the raw spirit as made in Scotland and those other tastes brought in from abroad that has made the greatest and most enduring impression on me.¹

Banks's statement, in which whisky becomes a metaphor for Scottishness, is just part of a wider movement in Scottish literary and cultural life towards a recognition and appreciation of the plurality, diversity and hybridity of Scottish culture. Yet though Banks is far from unique in his sentiments, there is something, in my view, that is particularly symptomatic in his rhetoric. His metaphor insists that Scottish culture, like Scotch itself, is heterogeneous and hybrid. Yet its persuasive power derives from the supposed authentic Scottishness of Scotch: it is because whisky is the essence of Scottishness that we find the truth about Scotch to be the truth about ourselves. The idea of an authentic Scottishness has therefore not been abandoned; rather, its content has merely changed, from the supposed purity of a single malt to the hybridity and diversity signified by whisky's maturation in casks that once held bourbon, sherry, port, wine or rum.

Banks's metaphor is, I believe, indicative of a general problem within recent reflections on Scottishness. The most significant trend in contemporary Scottish literary and cultural criticism has been towards anti-essentialism, and a sustained assault upon the myth of Scottish cultural unanimity and homogeneity.

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Yet, this movement – so I shall argue – has never quite fulfilled its anti-essentialist credentials: cultural homogeneity is painstakingly revealed to be an illusion born of essentialist presuppositions, but then cultural diversity itself is offered as the new essence of Scottishness, as the underlying national character to which Scottish culture should remain true. In other words, the cultural homogeneity that was supposed to indicate an underlying national being is too often the only – and mistaken – target of putatively anti-essentialist Scottish criticism. What remains undissolved is the idea of an inherent, intrinsic Scottishness, an essence that Scots may or may not manage to authentically express in their cultural, political and ethical life. This intrinsic Scottishness is diversity itself; plurality becomes the new essence of Scottishness.

This surreptitious return to essentialism largely escapes notice, I believe, because the key term in the Scottish anti-essentialist programme has not been defined with sufficient precision. The word ‘essentialism’ is presumably used with some vague consensus over its meaning, yet the concept has a complicated history, and we must seek clarity about its most appropriate sense in the debate over Scottish literature and culture.

Some of the anti-essentialist debate seems to be over what makes a person count as Scottish. The relevant meaning of ‘essentialism’ in this context would be that proposed in the Aristotelian distinction between the essential and accidental properties of an entity. Aristotle distinguishes between substantial change, in which the entity itself is destroyed, and those other kinds of change in which the entity endures, but is in some way modified. To take an axe to my kitchen table, and then burn its wreckage, is to bring about a substantial change; to paint it green, however, is to bring about an accidental modification. (It is the modification, of course, that is accidental; the cause of the modification is wholly intentional.) As Irving M. Copi explains, with reference to this example:

If we can distinguish the different kinds of change, then we can say that a given attribute is essential to an object if its loss would result in the destruction of that object, whereas an attribute is a mere accident if the object would remain identifiably and substantially the same without it.²

It may seem odd to apply this distinction to nationality: after all, to lose my nationality is not to be destroyed, any more than the fading of my tan after a holiday constitutes my destruction. But it has also been argued that the essence-accident distinction has no ontological status, but rather is relative to the nature

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of one's inquiry: a certain object may have many different kinds of essence depending upon the kind of question being asked about it.³ An inquiry into nationality, then, may legitimately ask after the essence of a Scotsman or woman as a member of a national community – as opposed to, say, as a living organism – and so distinguish between properties essential to being Scottish, and those that are accidental to it.

This account of essentialism is undoubtedly to some extent that intended by Scottish anti-essentialists, who occasionally talk of different definitions of Scottishness, and inquire whether to become or be Scottish is anything other than to acquire or maintain the relevant (essential) civic status. In this variant of anti-essentialism, the issue is whether Scottishness is adequately characterised by 'overarching definitions of the nation' that seem, nowadays, far too narrow when confronted with 'the multicultural, multireligious and also secular nature of contemporary Scotland'.⁴ The narrower definitions seem merely to have captured characteristics accidental to Scottishness, and to have thereby implicitly prescribed religious and cultural criteria for membership in the national community: 'The walls of Scottish civic society may have been over-run, but in the central cultural keep, the besieged few stand firm, marginalising at a cultural level those whom they have been forced to recognise politically'.⁵ Insofar as this kind of essentialism is the focus of discussion then it is debatable, I think, whether the critical programme should really be called 'anti-essentialism' at all. The new essence of being Scottish is simply a particular civic (rather than ethnic or cultural) status, and what is opposed are false accounts of Scottishness that seize on the accidental, variable characteristics of the Scots.

There is, however, another, more important sense of 'essentialism' relevant to the debate, but this sense is not – I think – appreciated with enough clarity. The relevant meaning this time is that in which the essence of something is its inner, hidden nature, upon which the thing's other, accidental or superficial attributes depend. In national essentialism of this kind, there is a hidden essence to the Scottish nation which underlies and explains its various cultural, ethical and political characteristics. Knowledge of the supposed hidden essence allows one to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic Scottishness according to whether the phenomena in question do, or do not, derive from the nation's inner nature. Such explanatory essentialism is distinct from, but contributes to, the anti-essentialist debate identified above. Insofar as there is a commitment to the idea of an underlying Scottishness, then there is a potential challenge to civic nationalism. The apparent diversity of the Scots may be

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regarded as a naïve or pre-theoretical apprehension of the facts. Only the expert, who is acquainted with the inner nature of Scottishness, is in a position to say whether certain characteristics of the population are genuinely derived from the national essence, or whether they are, on the other hand, pseudo-Scottish phenomena disconnected from the nation's inner reality.

The account of essentialism at work in this context certainly owes something to Aristotle, but also much to empiricist philosophy. The key distinction is less between essence and accident (although this re-appears, suitably modified), and more that between 'nominal' and 'real' essence. As David H. DeGrood explains, Locke

terms our complex ideas, or our abstract ideas, of substances 'nominal essences', since they point only to the name of the unity of co-existing properties, not to the real, underlying essence. The 'nominal essences', or more precisely, what the nominal essences denote, are thought to depend upon and flow from the 'real essences'.⁶

Although Locke was pessimistic about penetrating to the 'unknown constitution of the substance'⁷ from which its properties flowed, it was certainly an assumption of Baconian science that 'man can penetrate to the inmost essence of things, or to the internal constitution of insensible parts'.⁸ As Copi explains, modern science thus renewed the Aristotelian distinction between nominal and real definition:

To the extent to which one small group of properties of a substance can serve as a basis from which its other properties can be causally derived, to that extent we can be justified in identifying that group of properties as its real essence. This view [...] is in agreement with Aristotle's doctrine that the definition of a thing should state its essence, and that definition is a scientific process.⁹

We arrive then at another kind of essentialism in which knowledge of the real, 'insensible' essence of things explains their other, superficial, accidental qualities. With this knowledge, we may even come to classify the natural world differently, according to its real essences: things that are superficially the same, may turn out to be really different (fish and dolphins, say); things that are superficially different may be essentially the same (diamond and graphite).

Such explanatory essentialism is, I believe, what Scottish anti-essentialist criticism should be primarily directed against – namely, the attempt to delineate an inner Scottishness which could, in turn, serve to distinguish between true and false Scottishness, between real Scots and pseudo-Scots. The attack on essentialism in Scottish Studies should, in other words, follow the lead set already in feminism and post-colonialism, both of which provide fruitful analogies. For the sake of convenience, I will explore in this essay only the relevance of post-colonial racial anti-essentialism. This is not because feminism is less relevant, but because the racial anti-essentialist argument is more immediately plausible. To begin from feminist anti-essentialism, it would be necessary to show that there is no real essence of womanhood – constituted by ‘bone structure, gonads, hormones, chromosomes, and genes’¹⁰ – that underlies and explains our pre-scientific classification of the supposed female sex. But a critical analysis of what Myra J. Hird calls ‘the cultural need to support sexual dimorphism’,¹¹ and what Diana Fuss calls the ‘historical production’ of the categories “man” and “woman”,¹² would be too lengthy a digression in the present context; the case against racial essentialism can be more concisely and convincingly stated.

As Kwame Anthony Appiah explains, racial science was an attempt to discover what we might call (although Appiah does not) the real essence of the nominal essences afforded by seemingly obvious racial classifications: ‘nineteenth-century race science sought in a heritable racial essence an explanation of what its proponents took to be the observed phenomena of the differential distribution in human populations both of morphological and of psychological and social traits’.¹³ More recent scientific work, though, has shown that ‘the visible morphology – skin colour, hair type, facial features – on the basis of which we make our informal classifications’ gives no significant indication of an underlying human typology.¹⁴ The discrediting of racial science has consequences for cultural interpretation, for racial essentialism had supposed that cultural similarity (borne of psychological similarity) was amongst the features in the nominal essence of a race: cultural homogeneity was a component of the superficial commonality that flowed from the underlying real racial essence. But once the idea of real racial essence is exposed as a myth, then the obvious corollary is that cultural homogeneity is most likely an equally mythical residue of racial essentialism. This is why Appiah takes it upon himself to show that Africa, the home of the supposed black race, is culturally heterogeneous:

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The psychology of race has led [...] not only to a belief in the existence of a peculiar African *form* of thinking but also to a belief in special African *contents* of thought. The Beninois philosopher Paulin Hountondji has dubbed this view that Africa is culturally homogeneous [...] – ‘unanimism’.¹⁵

To anyone who might propose such unanimism, Appiah remarks simply that ‘[w]hatever Africans share, we do not have a common traditional culture, common languages, a common religious or conceptual vocabulary’¹⁶ – ‘taste the bland foods of Botswana after the spices of Fanti cooking; try understanding Kikuyu or Yoruba or Ffulfulde with a Twi dictionary’.¹⁷

For the analogy with racial anti-essentialism to hold in Scottish Studies, there must be found a history of national essentialism similar to the racial essentialism analysed by Appiah. The historiographic tradition of national character or spirit inaugurated in the eighteenth century by Herder is just such an equivalent. He proposes that ‘nations modify themselves, according to time, place, and their internal character: each bears in itself the standard of its perfection, totally independent of all comparison with that of others’.¹⁸ Herder’s ‘notion of national culture’ supposes, according to Charles Taylor, that ‘different *Völker* have their own way of being human, and shouldn’t betray it by aping others’.¹⁹ each *Volk* or people has its own proper nature, to which its historical development should remain true. In Herder’s view, explains F.M. Barnard, the essence of the *Volk* could be traced through analysis of its ‘socio-cultural characteristics’ – primarily language, but also such phenomena as ‘social customs, folk-lore and literary traditions’.²⁰ Methodical investigation could uncover, in Herder’s words, the “invisible, hidden, medium”²¹ that bound a people together, and gave them their distinctive national character. From this idea of national character there developed the tradition of political Romanticism in which ‘the Herderian concept of “*Völkgeist*” played a significant rôle’²² as that ‘decisive, spiritual characteristic, by virtue of which a collection of men acquired a distinct personality of its own’.²³

There is, then, a way of thinking about nationhood that relies upon the idea of some non-biological, but otherwise concealed real essence that is supposed to account for the nation’s more easily discernible characteristics. In the transition from biological to historiographic essentialism, the natural-scientific paradigm remains: the historian, or cultural and literary critic, supposedly engages in a methodical cognition that reveals the underlying national being from which the various forms of national life emanate. He or she may then

confront a national culture with the demand that it remain true to this methodically discovered real essence – that it does not malform or distort the expression of what the nation ‘really’ is. With this essentialist tradition in mind, we can attempt to identify an analogous search for an underlying Scottish national character: Eleanor Bell in *Questioning Scotland*, for instance, finds – rightly or wrongly – such a notion of Scottishness to be apparent in G. Gregory Smith’s account of the ‘Caledonian antisyzygy’²⁴ as well as in Cairns Craig’s far more recent claim for a Scottish ‘national imagination’.²⁵ Bell concludes that such cultural typifications are, in effect, outmoded and essentialist statements of national character – they are ‘redundant assertions of the “national psyche”, which can only, in actuality, be partial, yet which nonetheless claim a more significant and teleological status’.²⁶

This allegation about the essentialism of the earlier *corpus* of Scottish literary criticism is, I might add, open to debate. Even the venerable figure of Gregory Smith remarks by way of caution that ‘there is no Genius which presides over a nation’s literature with the authority of a Platonic archetype’.²⁷ But leave aside this debate: assume, for the sake of argument, that contemporary Scottish literary and cultural criticism has in fact identified an outmoded national essentialism in its own practices. One of the tasks of the Scottish anti-essentialist critic will be to challenge the supposed cultural unanimism that would otherwise stand as nominal essence to the real essence of the distinctive Scottish *Volksgeist*. Although this challenge is not the crux of anti-essentialism (for that, properly understood, is the critique of the notion of a real national essence), it is, nonetheless, an important peripheral aim. This is how we might understand the insistence, in *Questioning Scotland*, on a need to recognise ‘internal difference and alterity’ in Scottish history and culture.²⁸ This is, we could say, why Bell opposes this need to a now outmoded ‘imperative to establish a coherent and organised cultural identity’ central to which is ‘the notion of homogeneity’.²⁹ In a similar vein, we might identify the same underlying problematic when the editors of a volume of essays appropriately entitled *Beyond Scotland* refer to ‘an over-determined, self-defeating essentialism’ in past criticism of Scottish literature, an essentialism that contrasts with Scottish literature itself, which ‘has found its “proper ground” in heterogeneity and *inter-dependence*’.³⁰ With invariable success, such putatively anti-essentialist criticism reveals that the traditional, supposedly unanimous national culture is as mixed and variegated as the ‘hybrid’ cultures of populations that have moved between nations.

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Naturally, there are some risks in the enthusiastic exploration of Scotland's cultural diversity. One significant problem is that the plurality thus revealed comprises many different kinds of identity, not all of which can stand in relations of mutual celebration. This problem pertains especially to the issue of socio-economic class. A chapter in the recent *Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature* refers, for instance, to the role of contemporary Scottish children's fiction in 'demolish[ing] the divisive barriers of religion, class and ethnicity',³¹ and praises Theresa Breslin's *Divided City* (2005) for depicting a friendship between two boys, one of whom is a middle-class Protestant, and the other of whom is a working-class Catholic. Such an analysis tends, however, to blend together religious and class differences as equal modes of diversity, and to treat class conflict as if it were essentially the same as sectarianism. But the two are, of course, different – for while we might imagine sects without sectarianism, it is harder to conceive of economic classes without class conflict. This is why another essay in the same collection insists that '[c]lass antagonism' should *not* be 'rewritten as cultural diversity', that it should *not* become 'a revalued sign of the post nation's healthy polyphony'.³²

I might add, also, that the problem is not merely that class identities tend to be antagonistic, and so resistant to pluralistic mutual celebration. The problem, more fundamentally, is that it makes little sense to preserve and celebrate *economic* class identity as we might a sexual, ethnic or cultural identity. One might – as much Scottish literature does – recover from stigmatisation the culture of those who are working-class. Or, at least, one can do so in so far as these cultural traits are – like accent, dialect and orthography – purely arbitrary (analogous to the Saussurean signifier); one cannot legitimately do so when the cultural trait is an index of poverty and disadvantage (poor diet, criminality, illiteracy). But regardless of the extent to which such cultural phenomena can be celebrated, the point remains that to be working-class is not to have a particular *cultural* identity, and that to identify as working-class is not essentially to ask that one's group identity be respected as any other: 'From the economic standpoint, [...] what poor people want is not to contribute to diversity but to minimize their contribution to it – they want to stop being poor'.³³

Nonetheless, despite such problems, opposition to the mythology of Scottish cultural unanimism is an important and easily recognisable feature of the critical landscape. But there is something rather ambiguous in the declared anti-essentialist credentials of this critical programme. Even though the language of anti-essentialism is frequently invoked, the critical literature becomes too

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often fixated on opposition to a homogeneous nominal essence, rather than upon the more important thesis of the non-existence of an inherent or underlying real essence of Scottishness. The latter element, which is really the crux of anti-essentialism, tends to be simply sidelined. As a consequence, the attack on the myth of Scottish unanimism subtly transforms itself into something fundamentally essentialist. The illusion of cultural homogeneity is reconfigured as a pre-theoretical appearance stripped away by methodical investigation to reveal a previously hidden cultural plurality. This plurality is then offered – equivocally, not quite explicitly – as the real essence of Scottishness.

Evidence of this retreat from anti-essentialism *sensu stricto* is apparent in many of the putatively anti-essentialist claims that have recently been made in Scottish literary and cultural criticism. In one statement of supposed anti-essentialism, for instance, it is argued that ‘opening out the possibilities of nationhood does not equal abandoning the national past or culture; rather it involves a revision of how we understand and represent these, with an emphasis on the need for recognising internal difference and alterity’.³⁴ This statement points back toward essentialism: the possibilities of nationhood are, we should note, *constrained* by the national past or culture. The representation of ‘internal difference and alterity’ is, to be sure, more factually accurate, for it explodes the myth of cultural unanimism. But this representation is reconfigured as a display of the authentic ‘possibilities’ of nationhood that somehow *legitimizes* a more culturally diverse society. Nor is the above passage an isolated gesture towards diversity as the new standard of authentic Scottishness. There is, in truth, a great deal of emphasis in the relevant literature on re-reading Scottishness in order to find the authentic diversity of the Scottish national character. In the introduction to *Beyond Scotland*, as I have already indicated, we are told that Scottish literature ‘has found its “proper ground” in heterogeneity and *inter*-dependence’.³⁵ The use of quotation marks here indicates an embarrassment for the anti-essentialist credentials of the volume: the idea of heterogeneity as something belonging to and grounding Scottish culture is precisely a residual idea of a real national essence. In another, earlier statement in the putatively anti-essentialist strand of Scottish cultural criticism, it is argued that any authentic exponent of a national culture – and, *a fortiori*, any authentic exponent of Scottish culture – must celebrate the diversity and hybridity found within it: ‘home has no one, pure language; its language is heteroglot, richly impure. Writers who delight in this seem to me more authentically “identifying poets”’.³⁶ The monoglot writer, by implication, is untrue to his or her nation. This problematic trend is apparent also in the introduction

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to another edited volume, *Ethically Speaking*, a title which indicates the supposed ethical implications of putatively anti-essentialist Scottish literary criticism. The editors ask:

Can the writing of the novelists, poets and translators contemporaneous with the emergence of a newly empowered Scotland help us to read the country and its people in a new way? Perhaps most usefully, they remind us of a small nation's sheer diversity.³⁷

They conclude by remarking that, '[e]thically speaking, Scottish writers point out the need to attend to many different narratives and retellings in order that Scots might live more honestly and clearsightedly with themselves'.³⁸ The implication is that the Scots should commit politically-cum-ethically to diversity once they remember, through clear-sighted and honest self-apprehension, the underlying nature of their national culture.

A puzzling and improper transition can be discerned in these statements, for they all imply that a national commitment to greater cultural homogeneity would be an improper, inauthentic, superficial or illegitimate expression of Scottishness. The anti-essentialist critic *should*, I have argued, reveal Scotland's cultural diversity only because cultural unanimism is a corollary (as 'nominal essence') to a mistaken belief in a real national essence. But, as shown in the examples above, Scottish critics marching under the banner of anti-essentialism frequently expose cultural diversity in order to then espouse it as the deeper, essential reality to which the healthy, authentic, properly-identifying nation should conform.

One way to obscure such lingering essentialism is to translate it into metaphors that equate nation and selfhood, so that national essentialism becomes cloaked with a psychological, spiritual vocabulary. There is more sympathy, I suspect, for the idea of a person being true to him- or herself than for the idea of a nation being true to itself. Metaphors of a national psyche can therefore exploit the more appealing notion of personal authenticity. We find in such rhetoric what Appiah calls 'the philosophical realism (which is nowadays usually called "essentialism") that seems inherent in the way questions of authenticity are normally posed. Authenticity speaks of the real self buried in there, the self one has to dig out and express'.³⁹ What the putatively anti-essentialist Scottish literary and cultural critic may therefore do is to apply the ideal of personal authenticity to the being of the nation, thereby creating a national essentialism

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translated into metaphors of spiritual slumber and awakening. In so doing, of course, he or she returns to the essentialism of national character proposed by Herder, who 'applied his conception of originality [...] not only to the individual person among other persons, but also to the culture-bearing people among other peoples. Just like individuals, a *Volk* should be true to itself.'⁴⁰

A discussion of Scottish Catholic literature in the collection *Beyond Scotland* provides in my view a useful illustration of this mistaken return to essentialism within the supposedly anti-essentialist programme in Scottish literary and cultural studies. In an essay significantly entitled 'The Return of the Repressed', the representation of a heterogeneous cultural reality is moulded into a national analogue to the psychological phenomena of self-awareness, authenticity, and anamnesis. According to this essay, Scotland has been unconscious of what it really is: mixed and impure – 'certain Scottish identities, whether aesthetic or critical, are *deliberately* built on exclusion or, in Freud's phrase, "pushed out of consciousness"; [...] the subject of what is here termed "repression" is eloquent of certain unexamined "anxieties" within mainstream Scottish criticism'.⁴¹ The elision of Scottish Catholic history and traditions is thus a kind of national amnesia: 'despite assertion and celebration of Scottish literary and critical "plurality" ("Scotlands", not "Scotland"), there persists a sense in which some cultural roots are remembered more than others'.⁴² Although the essay contends that 'Scottish literature still needs to relinquish its investment in the idea of "tradition(s)", bound up with ideas of "authenticity"',⁴³ it is exactly the idea of an authentic tradition that its argument relies upon: by 'remembering' a heterogeneous cultural history, Scotland becomes truer to itself.

The above essay refers to the composer James MacMillan's 1999 lecture to the Edinburgh International Festival on what he perceives as an anti-Catholicism endemic in Scottish culture. The influence of MacMillan's argument, which became a *cause célèbre* in discussions of Scottish sectarianism, may well have something to do with the misunderstandings of anti-essentialism that I have identified. The lecture presents, in my view, a paradigm of the mistaken return to essentialism within the nominally anti-essentialist programme. The cause of anti-Catholic feeling is identified by MacMillan as a 'tendency to restrict, to control and to enforce conformity and homogeneity'.⁴⁴ Yet, while dissolving the myth of a homogeneous Scottish culture, MacMillan's argument simultaneously offers the awakening of a deeper, more authentic, pluralistic national character: 'If I have a mission I think this must involve acts of remembrance, of recollection, of rediscovery of our past, or re-animation of our heritage,

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of a reawakening of our culture'.⁴⁵ If Scots do not forget their past, then they will 'see history begin to repeat itself': the (alleged) recent history of anti-Catholic discrimination will find its analogue in 'religious and racist prejudice' directed at the Scottish Islamic community.⁴⁶

There is, of course, a factual problem with this argument: namely, just whether there is indeed endemic anti-Catholic sentiment in Scotland, accompanied by a more general hostility to diversity. Sectarianism is still found in certain sections of the Scottish population, but it seems to be on the decline. This is certainly what Steve Bruce and his co-authors believe: they conclude that 'changes in the Scottish economy, polity and society since the late 1930s have reduced the importance of religious and ethnic identity to a point of irrelevance';⁴⁷ they also argue that homophobia is declining.⁴⁸ Bruce et al. present no figures for racism, but even were racism not declining (which I think is unlikely), Scotland is in the same political position regarding racism as that identified by Walter Benn Michaels for the US:

even when *we* are racist, the society to which we are committed is not. This is partly because racism has been pushed to the fringes of public life and partly because racism has been privatized, converted from a political position into a personal failing.⁴⁹

There seems little evidence in devolved Scotland of any determination at a political level to legitimate homophobia, sectarianism, or any other manifestation of anti-diversity feeling.

The kind of argument advanced by MacMillan is also confusing because it leaves entirely empty just what kind of pluralism will naturally occur to the Scot who 'remembers' the history of Scottish Catholicism. Will he or she recognise 'a homology between identity groups and persons',⁵⁰ and so argue, perhaps, that identity groups have rights, and even rights over the autonomy of their members? Will there be 'exit routes' from subnational group identity – or will apostasy, and its secular equivalents, be forbidden or penalised? And at what point does a minority become sizeable enough to be recognized in, for instance, separate state provision, such as education? These are just some of the immediately obvious questions about what pluralism might mean in Scotland. There are surely many others. But all these interesting and vital questions are entirely bypassed by 'the celebration of diversity'⁵¹ supposedly mandated by the reawakened 'memory' of the authentically identifying Scot.

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Leaving aside such difficulties, however, the central problem lies in the peculiar metaphors of cultural memory which are used within MacMillan's lecture. Incongruous though it may sound, these tropes mean that its argument is an exercise in the same spirit as Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987). As Michaels notes, '*Beloved*, according to Morrison, is a story about something no one wants to remember. [...] What no one wants to remember, she thinks, is slavery, [...] although no white people or black people now living ever experienced it, slavery can be and must be either remembered or forgotten.'⁵² In a similar vein, one might point out that no-one alive today *remembers* pre-Reformation Scotland; they may or may not know about it, but this knowledge is not memory. Yet, in the anamnestic argument, the phenomena of cultural transmission, continuity, and change are strategically modelled on a psychic analogy of forgetfulness and remembrance. I say 'strategically' modelled, because the project of recovery from a homogenising national 'memory' is not purely cognitive in its interest. Our anamnesis as Scots, our 'awakening' to our 'cultural roots', is not merely a matter of knowing things better than we did; it is a matter of knowing ourselves better than we did, and so knowing a more accurate conception of what is good for us. And with this improved conception of who we essentially are (plural, diverse, heterogeneous), we are supposed to recognise the wrongfulness of contemporary sectarianism and its alleged analogues. Opposition to diversity is not shown to be categorically wrong; it is shown to be wrong *for us*.

This kind of argument, in which the cultural critic is something like a counsellor or psychotherapist to the nation, is inconsistent with a properly anti-essentialist programme. The problem is, as Michaels puts it, that the anti-essentialist must accept that 'insofar as our culture remains nothing more than what we do and believe, it is impotently descriptive'.⁵³ He gives the example of the teaching of Shakespeare:

It makes no sense, for example, to claim that we shouldn't teach Shakespeare because he isn't part of our culture since to teach him will immediately *make* him part of our culture, but it also makes no sense to claim that we should teach him because he is part of our culture since, if we stop teaching him, he won't be any longer.⁵⁴

The distinction between right or wrong, should or should not, collapses: there is nothing that would count as *not* doing what one *should* do, precisely because

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what one *should* do is defined as what one does. To return to a Scottish context, to say that we *should* be politically committed to diversity because that is our way of doing things is to mistakenly construe a fact as a norm. The only way out of this *impasse* would be to argue that some of our ways of doing things (e.g. political pluralism) are in greater harmony with our essential Scottishness. With this essentialist *proviso* in mind, one could then claim that even if opposition to cultural diversity were politically mandated, it would nonetheless be a betrayal of genuine Scottishness.

But, beyond its inconsistency with anti-essentialism, it is doubtful even that the national authenticity argument is in fact what matters to those who call for the celebration of diversity. Consider that, logically, the anamnestic argument opens up the possibility of quite another Scottish culture in which opposition to cultural diversity would be an honest expression of essential Scottish values. Let us imagine that we could not identify a plural Scotland: let us say that Scotland's past culture was homogeneous. In this case, using the anamnestic model, sectarianism and xenophobia would be good *for us*, once we had reawakened to our homogeneous cultural roots, and so recovered from our psychopathological tendency to enforce cultural diversity. The anamnestic argument makes a political commitment to diversity contingent upon the recovery of a plural tradition – but I am sure that the claim for pluralism is far stronger than the supposed fact of its continuity with particular national traditions.

No-one, then, really believes that we should commit to political pluralism only if we can recover an authentic tradition of diversity. But just why is accurate scholarship on Scottish literature and culture represented as having this politically legitimatory role? A full answer is beyond the scope of this essay, but I speculate that it would involve the more general political demand that the humanities produce socially 'useful' knowledge. The debate around cultural pluralism has become immensely significant in recent years, and presents a marketing opportunity for the arts and humanities: how better to secure prestige and 'relevance' than to misrepresent anti-essentialism as the legitimization of a pluralistic political programme? The ultimate significance of anti-essentialism is, however, quite different: once freed from the demand that our political culture properly manifest our underlying national character, we no longer have to discover the real essence of the nation in order to justify what we do. Perhaps, of course, the man or woman in the street thinks differently, and will only consent to pluralism when it is shown to be sufficiently Scottish. But though the manufacture of consent in this way may be a task suited to the

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politician, it can be of no interest to the rigorously anti-essentialist critic, who must regard this mode of justification as merely a popular error.

Moreover, once a properly anti-essentialist criticism becomes established in Scottish Studies, there will be some notable scholarly benefits. Scottish literary and cultural studies seem to me inhibited at the moment by the anxiety that any account of national distinctiveness, and of the reasons for it, is the imposition of a mythical national homogeneity upon Scotland's fundamental plurality. In my own work on the history of Scottish ideas, I have argued for the existence of a distinctive type of Scottish psychoanalysis that rejected the Freudian account in which human life was fundamentally hedonistic, selfish, and asocial.⁵⁵ Scottish psychoanalysis argued instead that human beings were essentially social, and that the 'tenderness' between infant and carer was more important than their supposed 'erotic' relation. But my conclusion that Scottish psychoanalysis was distinctive when compared to developments in France, the USA, and even England, is not an assertion that this distinctiveness was the expression of some underlying 'cultural DNA'. Instead, this difference was the outcome of a number of different factors at work in Scotland: a tradition of philosophical inquiry into all disciplines (including psychoanalysis), a search for a way to 'demythologise' Christian ideas such as communion and repentance, the greater prominence in Scotland of psychoanalytic theorists such as Alfred Adler, the relative geographical isolation of Scots from the schools established in London – these are a few of the relevant 'variables'. The moral that can be drawn from my own work applies more generally to Scottish cultural and literary studies, a field in which researchers may yet hope to discuss the nationally distinctive development of music, literature, philosophy, theology, and a host of other phenomena. Nationality is one dimension of cultural difference, and there are factors – other than the existence of some supposed 'national essence' – which explain how and why certain kinds of national difference arise. To be able to do research in this area, one must be allowed to discuss Scottish distinctiveness without the inhibiting anxiety that one's results will be misinterpreted as a *sous entendu* attack on a supposedly desirable programme of political pluralism.

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Notes

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- ⁴ Eleanor Bell, *Questioning Scotland: Literature, Nationalism, Postmodernism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p.43.
- ⁵ Gavin Miller, 'How Not to "Question Scotland"', *Scottish Affairs*, no. 52 (2005), 1–14 (p.4).
- ⁶ David H. DeGrood, *Philosophies of Essence: An Examination of the Category of Essence*, 2nd edn (Amsterdam: B.R. Grüner, 1976), p.56.
- ⁷ DeGrood, p.55.
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- ¹⁰ Myra J. Hird, *Sex, Gender, and Science* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p.30.
- ¹¹ Hird, p.42.
- ¹² Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1990), p.3.
- ¹³ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (London: Methuen, 1992), p.62.
- ¹⁴ Appiah, *In My Father's House*, p.59.
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- ¹⁶ Ibid., p.41.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p.40.
- ¹⁸ Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, trans. by T.O. Churchill, ed. by Leonard Krieger, *Classic European Historians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p.98.
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- ²⁰ F.M. Barnard, *Herder's Social and Political Thought: from Enlightenment to Nationalism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), p.117.
- ²¹ Cited in Barnard, p.117.
- ²² Barnard, p.160.

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- ²³ Ibid., p.161.
- ²⁴ Bell, p.3.
- ²⁵ Ibid., p.88.
- ²⁶ Ibid., pp.97–98.
- ²⁷ G. Gregory Smith, *Scottish Literature: Character & Influence* (London: Macmillan, 1919), p.3.
- ²⁸ Bell, p.94.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p.91.
- ³⁰ Gerard Carruthers, David Goldie and Alastair Renfrew, 'Introduction', in *Beyond Scotland: New Contexts for Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature* (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2004), pp.11–15 (p.14).
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- ³² Aaron Kelly, 'James Kelman and the Deterritorialisation of Power', in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. by Berthold Schoene (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp.175–183 (p.177).
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- ⁴⁰ Charles Taylor, 'The Politics of Recognition', in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. by Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp.25–73 (p.31).
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- ⁴² Dunnigan, p.129.

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- ⁴⁴ James MacMillan, 'Scotland's Shame', in *Scotland's Shame?: Bigotry and Sectarianism in Modern Scotland*, ed. by T.M. Devine (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2000), pp.13–24 (p.16).
- ⁴⁵ MacMillan, 'Scotland's Shame', p.14.
- ⁴⁶ James MacMillan, "I had not thought about it like that before", in *Scotland's Shame? Bigotry and Sectarianism in Modern Scotland*, ed. by T.M. Devine (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2000), pp.265–270 (pp.266–267).
- ⁴⁷ Steve Bruce, and others, *Sectarianism in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), pp.172–173.
- ⁴⁸ Bruce, and others, pp.102–103.
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- ⁵² Walter Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), p.135.
- ⁵³ Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), p.129.
- ⁵⁴ Michaels, *Our America*, p.128.
- ⁵⁵ Gavin Miller, 'Scottish Psychoanalysis: a Rational Religion', *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 44, no. 1 (2008), 39–59.

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